

RATIONALES FOR INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION (I)

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Internationalisation is high on the agendas of national governments, international bodies and institutions of higher education. European programmes like SOCRATES and international networks of universities, are just two examples of the way in which the international dimension has captured higher education in the past fifteen years.

Are we at the beginning of a future in which we are, in the words of Clark Kerr (1994, 9), on our way again to the "universalism of learning: the universal-university world", the revival of the cosmopolitan university of the medieval times, but within the context of a new modern world and a new age, the information age, in which society, economy and knowledge are part of a global environment, a mix of local and global influences?

Those medieval days that universities could hide themselves in their Ivory Towers are far behind us. Since the times of Reformation, in the past five hundred years, universities have broken with, as Guy Neave (1997,15) says, the "hitherto accepted value that knowledge is universal".

Education came to serve the administrative and economic interests of the nation-states and became an essential aspect of the development of national identity. The scholar became from a wanderer a citizen.

But in the second half of this century, learning again has become more international. Not only do we notice a stronger emphasis from the nation-states and their international bodies on international co-operation and exchange. We also see that institutions develop their own strategies to internationalise their research and their teaching.

Why and how is this happening? What are the rationales behind this revival? What strategies are developed? And what is its future? Is internationalisation only the flavour of the month and overruled soon again by other fashions, like lifelong learning, distance and open education, multi-media? Or will

internationalisation stabilise itself as an integral part of higher education policies? And is internationalisation the solution to all our present problems of a multicultural and international society? Are we absolutely convinced that internationalisation will bring the local and the global into perfect harmony, or should we limit our optimism and see internationalisation only as one of the many ways in which multiculturalism, peace and mutual understanding can be tried to overcome?

1. Meaning

What do we mean with internationalisation of higher education? It would be going too far to present and discuss here the many different definitions, terms and approaches to internationalisation present in literature and higher education practice. In the course of a comparative study, Jane Knight of Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto, Canada, and I have been working on for the Programme on Institutional Management of Higher Education (IMHE) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), we have come to the following working definition: "Internationalisation of higher education is the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution." (1997, 8)

As you will notice from this definition, it includes several important elements:

- internationalisation is a process
- internationalisation is a response to the international , to globalisation and is not to be confused with the globalisation process itself
- internationalisation includes both international and local elements (intercultural).

This way of looking to and defining of internationalisation of higher education is quite different than what frequently is done in studies dealing with this theme. In most studies internationalisation of higher education is narrowed to one or a few activities, academic mobility, global or multicultural education, area studies, study abroad, etcetera.

In these and other studies internationalisation is confused with a rationale: a political one, like peace and mutual understanding, or an economic one, like the needs of a more and more international labour market, etcetera.

And most of the studies ignore the link between international and local, between studying in an international environment and the fact that that environment includes the local environment.

Such studies see internationalisation not as a process but as an activity with a beginning and with an end.

That is why, quite confusing, the term international education is so often used in exchange with internationalisation of higher education and its different activities and approaches.

International Education assumes that education already has become international, I would dare to say- we are only in a process of internationalising and the end, being international, is remote and difficult to define.[\(11\)](#)

2. Rationales

Why are institutions of higher education, national governments , international bodies and more and more the private sector -banks, industry, foundations- so actively involved in international educative activities? There is not one single answer to that question, as is often thought.

In the study Jane Knight and I did for OECD, we distinguish four groups of rationales: academic, social/cultural, political and economic rationales (1995, 9-14). Rationales can be described as motivations for integrating an international dimension into higher education. They address the "why" of internationalisation. And different rationales imply different means and ends to internationalisation.

When analysing rationales, we have to take into account the diversity of stakeholders' groups in higher education: the government sector, the private sector and the educational sector. And within the last group we have to distinguish between three subgroups: the institutional level, the academics and their departments, and the students.

It is important to keep in mind that:

- a. there is a strong overlap in rationales within and between different stakeholders' groups; the main differences are in the hierarchy of priorities;
- b. in general, stakeholders do not have one exclusive rationale but a combination of rationales for internationalisation with a hierarchy in priorities;
- c. rationales may differ between stakeholders' groups and within stakeholders' groups;
- d. priorities in rationales may change over time and may change by country and region;
- e. rationales are in general more implicit than explicit motives for internationalisation.

3. Historical development of rationales' dominance

In the course of the history of higher education, in European medieval times and in the Arab university world even before, academic and social/cultural rationales were dominant: the wandering scholar looking for knowledge and understanding of other cultures.

These rationales, although less dominant now, have always been and still are present in higher education.

But later, during the process of the development of the nation-state and its colonial expansion, political rationales became more and more present. By copying the European models of higher education in the colonies in the Americas, Africa and Asia, the European nations were looking for political, cultural, economic and academic dominance, of which most nations and their universities are still trying to escape.

With the rise of political and economic influence of the United States of America as an international power in this century, and in particular after the Second World War, this political rationale got a new dimension. To maintain and expand its influence, knowledge of other cultures, languages and systems, became of crucial importance.

Universities in the United States were stimulated with federal funding, mainly from budgets of The State Department and the Defence Department, to develop area studies, foreign language training and study abroad.

Although seen in the rest of the world by many as a sign of American imperialism -matched by a similar trend in the former Soviet Union-, it was presented as a stimulus of peace and mutual understanding. Quotes of senators and presidents of the post war period make that clear.

Senator Fulbright spoke of educational exchange as, "from the standpoint of future world peace and order, probably the most important and potentially rewarding of our foreign policy activities."

And he was followed by others such as president George Bush, saying in 1989 still: "International exchanges are not a great tide to sweep away all difference. But they will slowly wear away obstacles to peace as surely as water wears away a hard stone."

This optimistic view on international education as a way of peace making force, has been dominant in American politics and higher education in the past fifty years, still is rather wide spread there and has found supporters elsewhere. For instance, the present policy statement of the International Association of University Presidents speaks of "promoting vigorously the internationalisation of their institutions and the global competence and literacy of their students as being essential to the long term pursuit of a more peaceful world where international understanding and co-operation in solving problems will be increasingly critical for the quality of life and sustained economic, social and cultural development."

Although it is quite tempting to sympathise with such a view of internationalisation of higher education, one, in my view, should be careful with such a pure political rationale for internationalisation. Who's peace is it and who's understanding of the world? Was and is higher education in the rest of the world in the position to place its understanding on equal terms with that of the American and European academic world? Does such a view provide space for an own national identity?

In our comparative study of internationalisation strategies in Asia Pacific countries, Jane Knight and I did find as one of the most clear rationales for internationalisation of higher education, not so much global identity but national identity. (1997, 23-27) By becoming part of a global environment on more equal terms, higher education and society can move away from dependency and dominance of western technology, western means and languages of instruction. Not for instance the expansion of English as language of instruction -an issue in several European continental higher education institutions-, but the option of local languages of instruction -in replacement of the colonial, mainly English language, a heritage from the past, is an international strategic issue in several Asian countries and universities.

This local or national impact of internationalisation seems to have become overshadowed in Europe and the United States, where globalisation and uniformity seem more dominant. Still, already in 1952, the Czech born political scientist Karl Wolfgang Deutsch wrote, at Harvard: "there is an excellent change that among the hundreds and thousands of foreign students at the universities today there may be a considerable number of young men and women who may go back one day to their countries with a deeper emotional attachment to their own nation and often with a deeper nationalism than the one with which they came".

Many national leaders have had their education abroad, and, in that other cultural environment, became more attached to their own national identity than before. International education is not only a confrontation with the other but also, and maybe even more, with the own culture.

For international education, is true what Mark Twain said about travel, namely "that it is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow mindedness", and what Paul Theroux wrote: "Being mistaken is the essence of the travellers tale." But where most studies indicate that students studying abroad did not change much in their attitude on their host country, there are clear indications that overcoming mistakes and prejudices of the own culture are as much important effects as overcoming those of other cultures.

I always remember clearly from my own time as a student in Lima, Peru, that Peruvian students from lower income groups who had studied with a scholarship in the former Soviet Union were said to have come back as convinced capitalists, and students from rich families who had studied in the United States as the leaders of the radical left. So, they were impacted on a quite opposite way than intended by their host countries, and returned with a different impact than their sponsors -respectively the at that time left wing military regime, and the conservative oligarchy, had hoped for.(III)

From these examples, I hope it will be clear that the political rationale not always - and I would even be inclined to say, seldom- ends with the results intended by the donor and/or the receiver.

I have given so much attention to the political rationale, because it has been so dominant in post second world war initiatives to internationalise higher education. But after the end of the cold war, the emphasis has changed from the political to the economic.

The economic rationale was and still is the driving force behind the European programmes for cooperation and exchange in research, technology and education such as the Research and Development Programmes, COMETT and ERASMUS, although always -and today even more than ten years ago- combined with the political rationale to stimulate the development of a European citizenship.

This change from the political to the economic, is clearly demonstrated in a recent study on "National Policies for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in Europe", by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (1997). All the reports on the Northern European countries: the Scandinavian countries, Austria, Germany, the U.K. and The Netherlands, but also on Central and Eastern Europe, indicate a tendency from the educational, cultural and political to the economic as dominant rationale for internationalisation. The only exception was from Southern Europe, Greece, an indication that in that region higher education is still more driven by traditional rationales: academic, cultural and political.

The economic rationale is expressed in several ways, such as:

- the emphasis on internationalisation because of the requirements of the modern, more global labour force needed;
- joint international Research and Development projects to compete internationally in new technology;
- more attention to marketing of higher education on the international market: higher education as an export commodity, etcetera.

These economic rationales for internationalisation have an impact on the local context.

For instance, in business education, international business seems to become the main curriculum of business schools, responding to this supposed need for an international labour force. That, even in a more and more global economy, the large majority of the labour force will still be working in a local context, tends to become sometimes forgotten.

In the emphasis on Research and Development, research oriented to social, cultural and local issues is in danger to get less priority and opportunity.

And the growing competition for international students may have a negative impact both on the quality of the education -by lower selection standards- and on the basic finance of higher education institutions for the training of local students, as institutions are more and more based on funding resulting from recruitment of foreign students, what has to take place on a vulnerable international market, as the financial crisis in Asia has made so clear recently.[\(IV\)](#)

The political and in particular economic rationales that push at present institutions of higher education to become more international are mainly external factors.

That does not mean that universities have no incentive from inside to become more international. The academic environment itself has changed radically in the past fifty years. Higher Education has become more deregulated, diverse in income sources, privatised and market oriented. The entrepreneurial university of these days feels an inside need to become again more international. The academic rationale, in addition to the traditional search for universal knowledge and understanding, has become more modern.

More emphasis on professional education, on continuous education, on new areas such as environmental studies, information science, etc. require a comparative and international dimension, coming from outside, but also from demands of faculty and students. This will be a driving force for internationalisation that will be as important as the external factor.

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I - This article is partly based on an address at the conference "The International Universities: Global and Local roles", April 3-5, 1998, Richmond, the American International University in London.

II - The term international education has become so common, that it is not easy to avoid it, and also I use it frequently as an alternative for internationalisation of higher education, such as in the Journal of Studies in International Education, I am the editor of, and in the name of the European Association of International Education, I was co-founder of.

III - This also shows that rationales for and perspectives on internationalisation may differ by stakeholders.

IV - These critical observations to the economic rationales for internationalisation of higher education, so dominant at the moment, do not imply a plea against these economic rationales, they are only presented as concerns to take into account when internationalisation strategies are developed on the basis of economic rationales.